# ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN PROMOTING INFORMATION LITERACY SKILLS AMONG RURAL WOMEN: A STUDY.

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**Submitted by**

**Gouri Kodag**

**Research Guide**

Prof. Shantadevi .T

**Professor**

**Department of Library and Information Science**

**Karnataka State Akkamahadevi Women University**

**Vijayapura.**


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## Introduction

Information literacy is a critical skill set in the digital age, encompassing the ability to access, evaluate, analyze, and ethically use information from diverse sources. It goes beyond basic information retrieval and involves a multifaceted understanding of information, including its context, credibility, and relevance. Information literacy is not confined to traditional libraries but extends to various digital platforms, where an overwhelming volume of information is available. A literate individual is adept at navigating this information landscape, distinguishing between reliable and unreliable sources, and critically assessing the quality and credibility of information. The information literate person is not just a consumer but an active participant in creating and disseminating knowledge, understanding the ethical considerations of information use, and contributing meaningfully to the broader intellectual discourse. Information literacy is a dynamic skill that evolves with technological advancements, requiring individuals to adapt to new information formats, platforms, and communication channels. Educational institutions and libraries are pivotal in fostering information literacy, equipping learners with the skills to thrive in an information-rich society.

## Information Literacy: Meaning and Definition

Basically, information literacy appears to embody the ability to use information, or possibly the possession of knowledge of information. In order to find out how the concept has come to have its current meaning and to identify what skills and knowledge are required of a person in order to be information literate, meaning and some definitions are given below.

Zurkowski (1974) was the first to use the concept of information literacy: "People trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in moulding information-solutions to their problems."

**Information Literacy: Origin**

The concept was first introduced in 1974 by Paul Zurkowski, President of the Information Industry Association in a proposal submitted to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science. The proposal recommended that a national program be established to achieve universal information literacy within the next decade. Zurkowski, further defined this concept as “people trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literate. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in molding information solution to their problems.”

**Components of Information Literacy**

Information literacy describes a set of abilities that enables an individual to acquire, evaluate and use information. To be successful in information by academic or in any other individual the Information Literacy having Five Components that is fallows and these components helps to be success in real life or academically.

1. Identity
2. Find
3. Evaluate
4. Apply
5. Acknowledgments

## Review of literature

Zurkowski (1974) was the first to use the concept of information literacy: "People trained in the application of information resources to their work can be called information literates. They have learned techniques and skills for utilizing the wide range of information tools as well as primary sources in moulding information-solutions to their problems."

Information literacy is crucial for empowering individuals, particularly rural women, by enabling them to access, evaluate, and use information effectively. Studies by Bawden (2001) and Lankshear & Knobel (2003) highlight how information literacy can significantly contribute to improving education, health, and economic outcomes, empowering women to make informed decisions.

Research by S. R. Natarajan (2016) and IFLA (2015) emphasizes the role of libraries in providing rural women with resources that contribute to educational and social development. Libraries in rural areas serve as important information hubs, offering access to books, newspapers, internet, and community-based programs that promote learning and skill development.

Numerous studies highlight the barriers that rural women face in accessing information, including limited access to technology, low literacy rates, cultural constraints, and gender inequality. A study by G. Kumari (2018) discusses how rural women often struggle with navigating digital information due to a lack of basic computer skills and technological infrastructure in libraries.

According to the American Library Association (ALA, 2000**)**, *information literacy* is the ability to "recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information." Libraries have

traditionally played a central role in fostering such skills, especially through access to books, digital resources, and training programs.

Bruce (2003**)** emphasized the need for libraries to move beyond passive resource centers to active facilitators of learning, particularly in underprivileged regions. Libraries need to provide not only access but also guidance in navigating and critically assessing information.

UNESCO (2006) acknowledged libraries as crucial institutions for gender equality, particularly in developing countries. Women, especially in rural areas, often face cultural, social, and economic barriers to accessing information. Jain (2011) argued that rural libraries in India can empower women by providing access to health information, legal rights, literacy materials, and vocational guidance.

In Karnataka, Raghavendra and Kattimani (2014) studied the role of public libraries in empowering rural women and concluded that access to libraries enhanced women's participation in local governance, health awareness, and income-generating activities.

Rao and Bhat (2008) studied rural women’s information needs in southern India and noted that they often require information related to health care, child-rearing, agriculture, vocational training, and micro-financing. However, these needs frequently go unmet due to lack of targeted library services, language barriers, and lack of awareness.

Sangita and Swain (2015) noted that rural women often rely on informal sources of information (family, neighbors), which may not always be reliable or accurate. Libraries, therefore, have the potential to become trustworthy alternatives.

Rural libraries in India, including those in Karnataka, face various infrastructural and operational challenges. Naik (2017) pointed out issues like inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and limited access to ICT tools. These limitations restrict the ability of libraries to meet the evolving information needs of users, especially women.

Prakash and Tiwari (2019) further highlighted that many rural libraries are not women-friendly—either in terms of location, timings, or the type of content they offer.

The National Mission on Libraries (NML) launched by the Government of India aims to modernize public libraries and integrate them into national development programs. Under this mission, rural libraries in states like Karnataka have started offering digital services and community-based programs. Karnataka State Library Policy (2016) also emphasizes inclusive access and community development, although its implementation remains inconsistent.

With the rise of digital technologies, libraries are being seen as facilitators of digital literacy, particularly for marginalized populations. Kumar and Kumbar (2020) explored how rural libraries in Karnataka are slowly integrating ICTs to provide access to e-resources, but noted that digital illiteracy among women is a major bottleneck.

**Statement of problem:**

Statement of the problem is **Role of libraries in promoting information literacy skills among rural women: A study**

## Objectives of study

The objectives of the study on "The Role of Libraries in Promoting Information Literacy Among Rural Women: A Study " are:

1. To assess the availability and accessibility of library resources in rural areas focusing on their relevance to rural women.
2. To examine the role of libraries in enhancing information literacy among rural women, including digital literacy, information access, and usage.
3. To explore the impact of library programs and services on the empowerment of rural women.
4. To identify the challenges faced by rural women in utilizing library services and information resources effectively.
5. To suggest improvements in library services and programs to better serve the information needs of rural women .

## Need of study :

Information literacy is a dynamic skill that evolves with technological advancements, requiring individuals to adapt to new information formats, platforms, and communication channels. Educational institutions and libraries are pivotal in fostering information literacy, equipping learners with the skills to thrive in an information-rich society.

## Methodology:

In this study survey method will be adopted and questionnaire will be used as data collection tools like SPSS , Excel used to data analysis . Stratified sampling method will be used for selection of sampling

## Scope and limitations

The study focuses on rural women in Belagavi district, limiting its scope to this specific demographic and geographical area. It examines public and community libraries but may not capture the experiences of women in urban or other rural regions outside Karnataka. The sample size may also restrict the generalized ability of the findings. Language barriers and limited technological access in rural libraries may affect data accuracy and participation. Additionally, inconsistent data collection and record-keeping in libraries could limit a comprehensive understanding of library programs.

## Conclusion

Libraries play a pivotal role in enhancing information literacy skills among rural women in Belagavi District. Through targeted programs and resources, libraries can bridge the information gap by providing access to relevant educational material, fostering digital literacy, and empowering women to participate more effectively in social and economic activities. The study suggests that rural libraries need to continue evolving by offering specialized training, digital resources, and outreach programs tailored to the needs of rural women, overcoming challenges like accessibility, technological barriers, and cultural limitations.

Despite these advantages, the study highlights several areas of concern, such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of trained staff, and insufficient funding, which may limit the effectiveness of libraries in promoting information literacy. Addressing these issues will be crucial to further enhancing the capacity of libraries to empower rural women in Belagavi District.

Future research may explore how libraries in other states or regions compare in their efforts to support information literacy for women and how these models could be adapted for wider implementation across rural India.

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